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23 Dec 29

The Spirit of Christmas

by
GRACE E. CRAIG

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THE WOMANS PRESS
600 LEXINGTON AVENUE
NEW YORK

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Second printing, 1928

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

GUARDIAN ANGEL

MARY

NEWSBOY

FLOWER GIRL

FOUR CHURCH SCHOOL CHILDREN


FOUR SHEPHERDS

THREE KINGS

And for the Nativity Tableau which is the copy of any
suitable painting, as many characters as it requires.

English 23 Dec 29 Reid from student

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The Spirit of Christmas

by

GRACE E. CRAIG

The play may be given in any parish-room or hall. At one side of the platform there is a Christmas tree, brilliantly lighted. A curtain at the back conceals the rear of the stage. The costumes may be as elaborate or as simple as individual taste dictates. The GUARDIAN ANGEL should wear flowing white draperies, the SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS, a fairy dress of spangled white. Bible pictures will suggest costumes for the SHEPHERDS and KINGS. The hymns may be found in any standard collection; the carols in "Ten Traditional Carols" published by Oliver Ditson, New York. Just before the beginning of the play the audience may sing (if it is so desired) "Once in Royal David's City." (The references to Sunday-school throughout the play may be changed to any other organization.)

The play opens with the entrance of four CHILDREN, three girls and a boy. They come through the door at the end of the hall and pass slowly down the aisle talking together. Upon reaching the platform they gather about the tree.

FIRST GIRL: Oh, how beautiful!

THIRD GIRL: See the pretty lights!

BOY: And the shining tinsel!

SECOND GIRL: And the star!

BOY: I'm glad we are early. We can see it all before the other children come.

FIRST GIRL (*Pointing to heap of parcels under tree*):
There are the presents.

BOY: I wonder which is for me.

SECOND GIRL: Wasn't Santa Claus good to bring such a lovely tree?

BOY: Santa Claus didn't bring this tree. Our teachers trimmed it. I peeped in here this afternoon and saw them working.

SECOND GIRL: But I thought Santa Claus brought all Christmas trees.

BOY: Oh, no! Not all. Sometimes when he's busy our mothers and fathers and teachers get the trees and trim them.

SECOND GIRL: And you saw our teachers trimming this one.

BOY: Yes.

SECOND GIRL: They were good to do it. I wonder why they took so much trouble for us.

THIRD GIRL: I wonder, too.

FIRST GIRL: Why, because it's Christmas.

BOY: But they needn't have done it because of that.

FIRST GIRL: Because of that they *wanted* to do it.

THIRD GIRL: Why?

FIRST GIRL: I don't know, but I'm sure they did.

(*There enter at rear a NEWSBOY and a FLOWER GIRL. They are poorly clad. The boy carries a bundle of papers, the girl a flower tray. They come down the aisle timidly.*)

SECOND GIRL (*Spying them*): Why, who is this?

BOY: What shabby clothes!

FIRST GIRL (*Facing the intruders*): What do you want?
You don't belong to our Sunday-school.

FLOWER GIRL (*Timidly*): No, we don't, but we saw the church door open—

NEWSBOY: And we knew it was Christmas-time and we thought there might be a tree.

FLOWER GIRL: And so we came in.

BOY: Well, you can't stay.

FIRST GIRL: No, you can't stay. The rest of the children will be here soon, and there won't be room for you.

SECOND GIRL: Oh, let them stay! I'm sure there will be room.

THIRD GIRL: We can squeeze them in somewhere.

FIRST GIRL: Well, they can stay, but they must sit over there in that corner. (*Points to corner of a front seat.*)

(*The two children sit in the place indicated. There enters from the side the white-draped figure of the GUARDIAN ANGEL, who pauses near the GIRLS and BOY.*)

BOY (*Startled*): Oh!

THIRD GIRL: I'm afraid! (*Clings to FIRST GIRL.*)

FIRST GIRL (*Boldly*): Who are you?

GUARDIAN ANGEL: I am one of the great host which watches over the world, ever ready to give help to those who need it. I and my brethren are everywhere, but seldom visible.

BOY: Oh, a guardian angel!

GUARDIAN ANGEL: Listening just now, I learned that you children, though good pupils in —— Sunday-school, really knew little, very little, of Christmas, and I am, therefore, come to show you the truth.

FIRST GIRL: Oh, but we do know about Christmas!

SECOND GIRL: Yes, it's Christ's birthday.

THIRD GIRL: He was born in Bethlehem.

GUARDIAN ANGEL: I will teach you a great deal more than this if you will let me. Will you?

BOY: Yes, we will, gladly.

FIRST GIRL: Oh, yes, indeed!

THIRD GIRL: I don't know. I think I'm afraid.

GUARDIAN ANGEL: Fear not. You shall hear and see only what is beautiful.

BOY: She isn't really afraid.

GUARDIAN ANGEL (*Holding up hand*): Listen, then!

(*An unseen choir sings "What Child Is This" and the curtain at the back of the platform is drawn. The tableau of MARY holding the Christ Child in her arms is disclosed. The setting should suggest, if possible, the stable.*)

SECOND GIRL: Oh, look!

FIRST GIRL: It's the stable at Bethlehem!

THIRD GIRL: And the Baby Christ!

GUARDIAN ANGEL: A stable is not a grand place. Why, think you, did our Lord choose to be born there?

BOY: I've often wondered about that.

SECOND GIRL: I s'pose He might have lived in a palace.

GUARDIAN ANGEL: Watch closely and I think you will come to understand why He did not.

(*The children fall back into the shelter of the Christmas tree. There enter from the other side four SHEPHERDS. They are talking rapidly and peering anxiously about.*)

FIRST SHEPHERD: I am still nearly blinded by the wonderful light.

SECOND SHEPHERD: And my ears are ringing with the heavenly music.

THE SMALLEST SHEPHERD: Ah, do not pause! I long to find the Baby who is Christ the Lord!

THIRD SHEPHERD: Where shall we search? The men we lately met upon the way assured me that but one newborn babe lieth in Bethlehem this night, and he is in the stable of the Inn. This cannot be the Christ.

THE SMALLEST SHEPHERD: Let us find the stable.

THIRD SHEPHERD: 'Tis passing strange. None of those who are abroad to-night has seen the light or heard the angels' song. Perhaps 'twas all a dream.

THE SMALLEST SHEPHERD: Here is the stable! Let me peep within. (*Peers around at MARY and JESUS.*) Ah, I see Him! The little Jesus! 'Tis He, 'tis He!

FIRST SHEPHERD: I fear to enter. Perhaps poor, rough men like ourselves should not seek the Lord.

SECOND SHEPHERD: The angel bade us not to fear.

FIRST SHEPHERD: What was it he said?

THE SMALLEST SHEPHERD: "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people."

SECOND SHEPHERD: The good tidings then are for all people, even the poor and the lowly.

THE SMALLEST SHEPHERD: And, into a stable, such as *we* may freely go.

(*They all fall upon their knees before the Mother and Child, then rise and go softly toward the side of the stage where they entered, talking in low tones.*)

FIRST SHEPHERD: 'Tis in truth the Messiah!

SECOND SHEPHERD: Yes, the Messiah has come to bring peace and good will to all people. Hatred and cruelty and selfishness shall gradually vanish from the hearts of men, and truth and kindness and love shall grow apace upon the earth. For with the passing years more and more folk shall hear of the Baby of Bethlehem and seek to be like Him.

THE SMALLEST SHEPHERD: How glad I am that I have seen Him for myself!

(They pass out and the curtain falls.)

FIRST GIRL: Am I dreaming?

GUARDIAN ANGEL: Nay. 'Tis no dream. You but see that which occurred on the first Christmas Eve.

FIRST GIRL (*Thoughtfully*): To those lowly shepherds in the fields the Christmas story first was told.

BOY: And they were the first to seek the Christ.

SECOND GIRL: If He had been in a great palace those poor men would not have dared go in.

FIRST GIRL: Ah, don't you see? That was why He chose to be poor! So even the lowliest would not be afraid to come to Him.

SECOND GIRL: But how about the rich people? How did they ever find Him in a stable? He came to them, too, you know. The angel said "all people."

GUARDIAN ANGEL: Listen!

(The unseen choir sings the first two stanzas of "We Three Kings," and the curtain opens again. From the end of the room the three KINGS enter, gorgeously arrayed, and bearing offerings. They speak as they approach the platform.)

FIRST KING: We must hasten!

SECOND KING: See you still the star?

THIRD KING (*Peering upward*): Aye, 'tis still shining, and moving straight toward the little town of Bethlehem. See! It has paused over yonder stable! The King must be within.

FIRST KING: In a stable!

THIRD KING: Why not? So great a Lord can make a palace of a stable, and a throne of a manger.

SECOND KING: True. So wondrous a star would shine only for the greatest King ever born. For weary miles, over desert and mountain, have we followed it, and we will follow it still.

(They pass out and the curtain closes.)

FIRST GIRL: What very grand men!

SECOND GIRL: They had beautiful gifts for the Christ.

BOY: The shepherds had nothing to give the Lord.

THIRD GIRL: Oh, but they looked at Him so lovingly! I'm sure He liked their visit very much.

FIRST GIRL: The angels sang for the poor shepherds, and the star glowed for the rich kings, and all found the Christ when they sought Him.

SECOND GIRL: And everybody can see the star to-night if they will look.

FIRST GIRL: Yes, and hear the angel chorus if they will only listen.

BOY: And anybody can find Christ who lovingly seeks Him.

THIRD GIRL: That little Babe of Bethlehem was the greatest, most wonderful gift that has ever been given since the beginning of the world.

GUARDIAN ANGEL: And now do you not understand why we all wish to give at Christmas-time?

FIRST GIRL (*Solemnly*): Oh, I understand!

BOY: I'm glad I have something to give my teacher.

SECOND GIRL: I'd like to give something to the Christ Child Himself.

GUARDIAN ANGEL: Who are the children sitting in yonder corner?

FIRST GIRL: Why, I'd quite forgotten them. They are strangers who came in a while ago.

GUARDIAN ANGEL: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

BOY: But we never saw either of them and haven't a thing to give them.

SECOND GIRL: The shepherds gave the little Jesus loving looks.

FIRST GIRL (*Hastening to seat and dragging the NEWS-BOY and FLOWER GIRL out*): Forgive us for speaking unkindly when you came. You shall belong to our school to-night and have the presents which were meant for us.

FLOWER GIRL: Oh, no! We cannot take your gifts. But we should like to stay and sing with you.

SECOND GIRL: You shall do both.

GUARDIAN ANGEL: I see that you have learned your Christmas lesson well. I think you will not soon forget it.

ALL: Oh, never, never!

(*The SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS enters.*)

SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS: Greetings, my children!

(*All start back.*)

SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS: I am the Spirit of Christmastide. In my hand I hold the flower of happiness. None but myself has ever seen it growing; none but myself can bestow it upon mortals. Men and women who have not learned what you have learned to-night can never know me, but to all those who learn the lesson thoroughly I come, and always, always do I bring the Flower. Take you (*Holding out hands*) my gift.

FIRST GIRL (*Timidly*): We see nothing, fair Spirit!

SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS: You cannot see it for 'tis a spirit flower, but it has already begun to grow in your hearts! And it will flourish there forever!

FIRST GIRL: Ah, that is why we feel so strangely happy!

SECOND GIRL: I feel like singing.

BOY: And so do I.

FIRST GIRL (*Turning to audience*): Will you sing with us the hymn we love so much? Perhaps it will mean more to us to-night than it has ever meant before.

(*All join in singing "It Came upon the Midnight Clear." During the singing the CHILDREN take the FLOWER GIRL and NEWSBOY by the hands, and, followed by the SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS and the GUARDIAN ANGEL, they all pass out down the aisle through the audience, singing as they go.*)



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